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Stephen Jones, DDS Commissioner

Kentucky Dept. of Disability Determination Services Named Regional Office of the Year

By Lisa Wallace, CFC Communications

For the third time since 1994, the Kentucky Department for Disability Determination Services (DDS) in the Cabinet for Families and Children has been named 2001 DDS of the Year for the Social Security Administration's Atlanta Region. The office also received DDS of the Year honors in 1994 and 1997.

The region is comprised of the states of Kentucky, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. One of 10 SSA regions nationwide, the Atlanta region processes in excess of 25 percent of the national workload.

Kentucky DDS Commissioner Stephen Jones says that, while the award is a distinct honor, it doesn't come as a surprise, given the dedication and excellence of the DDS staff.

"The DDS staff performs under intense and demanding conditions just by the nature of our work," Jones said. "They consistently meet or exceed workload and accuracy goals and often complete budgeted tasks faster and at less cost than many other states."

Jones said being part of CFC also plays a role in the accomplishments of the DDS office. Support from CFC leadership was instrumental in raising the office to department status which, Jones said, has made it easier to put policies and procedures in place that enhance efficiency and effectiveness.

Performance criteria used by the Atlanta SSA Regional Office in selecting its DDS of the Year include the number and accuracy of cases processed, mean processing time and cost per case.

With an average case processing time of just 79.4 days, Kentucky has easily surpassed the national mean processing time of 120 days. Jones said it's particularly significant that, with one-fifth of the federal fiscal year elapsed, the Kentucky DDS has already completed 30.3 percent of its continuing disability reviews, which periodically assess benefit recipients' medical status to determine if any improvement has occurred affecting their ability to work.

As if fulfilling the demands of Kentucky's workload isn't enough, Jones said his office also routinely pitches in to help other states in the region which are struggling to meet their performance goals. Not only did the Kentucky DDS achieve its own goals in the last fiscal year; it also processed an additional 2,600 cases for the state of Georgia, and was still the first office in the region to complete its continuing disability review workload.

The Kentucky DDS, based in Frankfort, currently employs about 391 employees, including about 90 in its Louisville branch office. That's around 35 workers short of full employment capacity. Jones said he hopes to fill some currently vacant positions in the near future.

"I think DDS is a great place to work. It's one of the best-kept secrets in state government, as far as how much we value our employees and how well we all work together," he said.

One way the department demonstrates how much it appreciates its employees is through a program called State PRIDE, which stands for People Responsibly Influencing Decisional Excellence. Each year, employees who demonstrate exceptional performance in a number of areas are given special recognition at the department's PRIDE awards ceremonies. Awards for the 2001 fiscal year were given in October and recipients were:

- Dawn Caldwell - Staff Person of the Year
- John Wallshield - Examiner of the Year
- Dawn Disponette - Rookie Examiner of the Year
- Gina Sansone - Staff Supervisor of the Year
- Administrative Support Branch - Creative Achievement Award
- Ilza Sillers, PhD - Medical Consultant of the Year
- James Brown - Case Processing Supervisor of the Year
- Shirley Sharp - Special Act of Service
- Kimberly Dozier - Support Person of the Year and
- Bonnie Cox - Robert Hinrich Humanitarian of the Year Award.

Awards and recognition seem to be the rule rather than the exception at Kentucky's DDS. Also earning a distinction from the regional office this year was Physical Division Administrative Specialist Lou Anne Kelley-Cobb who was named Innovator of the Year. Kelley-Cobb played an important role in an extensive physical redesign of the DDS office in Frankfort undertaken by the department last year. Jones said she spearheaded the redesign of the building's layout and was able to save the department a lot of money in the process.

A recent administrative reorganization also involved a number of changes, most notably an increase in supervisory positions which realigned work and workers to better achieve goals and create advancement opportunities.

The department is a 100 percent federally funded program which does not negatively impact the state budget, but which does stimulate the state's

economy by placing eligible claimants in benefits status.

"Our main objective at DDS is to help people in Kentucky get on with their lives," Jones said. "A lot of people put their lives on hold while they wait for decisions from us on their disability claims. We strive to do our jobs and provide answers to claimants as quickly and as precisely as possible so they can move forward."

The state office follows strict guidelines imposed by the federal SSA in obtaining and processing the required information, performing mandatory reviews of medical and vocational documentation and rendering eligibility determinations. The office also assists claimants in obtaining medical documentation by referring them to medical professionals for free examinations and even providing transportation to and from medical appointments for those who can't afford it.

Medical testing, evaluation and diagnosis costs make up the bulk of the department's expenses and are vital to ensure claimants are able to provide all the required medical information for review of their claims.

"We give the public the benefit of the doubt and try to remove as many barriers and hindrances as we can in an effort to get the most complete, accurate and objective picture of the case possible," Jones said.

Being named DDS of the Year is nice, but serving citizens, not winning awards, is the department's goal, Jones said.

"If you win an award while doing your best, that's all the better," he said.

No Access to Building During Holidays

By Anya Armes Weber

All entrances to the Human Resources Building will be locked during the upcoming state holidays. There will be no guard stationed at the building Saturday, Dec. 22 through Tuesday,

Dec. 25, as well as from Saturday, Dec. 29, through Tuesday, Jan. 1. Only employees with 24-hour card access will be able to enter.

In an emergency, staff can call 695-6380 for assistance getting into the building.

The Christmas Tradition Continues...

*By Patricia Boler,
CFC Communications*



On Friday, Dec. 21, I will dress my children in their Christmas duds and load them in the car for our annual visit with Santa. I will not be fighting mall crowds or wading through department store aisles. We will drive right to the CHR Building to see Santa, as we have each of the past seven years.

We look forward each Christmas to visiting with Santa, a.k.a. Gene Mason. Gene is a former marine and career employee with Kentucky state government who retired from CHR Purchasing in 1995.

For the past 14 years, he has pulled on that red suit – beard and all – and made his way across Frankfort to visit CFC and CHS employees and their families.

Complete with photographer and elves, Santa visits Frankfort offices with one clear objective: making the children happy. Each child tells Santa his or her wish and receives a candy cane. Photos are taken of every child who visits with Santa. The photos are later developed and distributed to the families, free of charge.

In answer to that all important question asked at this time of year: Yes, there *is* a Santa Claus. He lives in Lexington, Kentucky. He has a heart of gold. Some people call him Gene, but we just call him Santa.

Lost and Found

A gold, filigree ring with a small diamond has been lost. If you have information, call Dawn Pulliam at 564-3703.

A \$20 bill was lost on the second floor as Glenda Burke prepared to buy gifts for a needy family. Call Glenda at 564-7514 if you have information. The money is to help three young girls.

A ring was found in the upper CHR Building parking lot near Glenn's Creek Road. To claim it, call Irene Sharp at 564-7718.

A watch was found near the visitors parking area at the CHR Building. To claim it, call Patti Glover at 564-7536.

CFC Quality Central Celebrates the Holidays with Food, Fun and Music



Employees gathered to have snacks and enjoy each other's company on December 4.



Secretary Miller watches as employees perform skits, sing songs and celebrate the upcoming holidays.



DCBS Commissioner's Office performs their song "Dietra Got Run Over By a Ramdeer".

Below, the FRYSC Office performs their version of the "Twelve Days of Christmas".



Above, Mike Jennings reads the CFC's version of "Twas the Night Before Christmas".